

Message Text

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ACTION IO-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GENEVA 5480

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ILA, PLAB
SUBJECT: 63RD SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR CONFERENCE:
GENEVA ASSESSMENT

REF: GENEVA 5270

SUMMARY: IN REFTEL, THE MISSION REPORTED ON THE RESULTS OF THE 63RD SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR CONFERENCE. SINCE THEN, THE OUT-COME OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR CONFERENCE (ILC), AND THE UP-COMING DECISION THAT THE USG WILL TAKE WITH RESPECT TO ITS MEMBERSHIP IN THE ILO HAVE BECOME THE PRINCIPLE SUBJECTS OF CONVERSATION IN THE GENEVA DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY. THE MAJOR THEMES OF THIS CONVERSATION CONCERN (1) THE ROLE PLAYED BY THE SOVIETS, (2) THE STREATEGIC AND TACTICAL MISCALCULATIONS THAT WE ARE CONSIDERED BY SOME TO HAVE MADE, (3) THE COURSES NOW OPEN TO US, AND (4) THE AFTERMATH. SOME OF THE COMMENTS BEING RECEIVED MAY SOUND OVERLY IMAGINATIVE, AND SOME OF THE ASSESSMENTS NOW BEING HEARD OF THE SITUATION BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE CONFERENCE DO NOT JIBE WITH OUR OWN, BUT MUCH OF THIS TALK UNDOUBTEDLY REFLECTS THE TENOR OF ASSESSMENTS NOW BEING FORWARDED TO CAPITALS. I THEREFORE THINK IT IMPORTANT THAT WASHINGTON KNOW HOW THESE JUDGMENTS RUN. END SUMMARY.

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1. THE SOVIET ROLE: MUCH INTEREST BY OBVERSERS HERE FOCUSES ON THE SOVIET ROLE DURING THE ILC, AND THE MOTIVES BEHIND THIS ROLE. CERTAINLY, THEY ARE PERCEIVED BY ALL TO HAVE BEEN ASSIDUOUSLY WORKING AGAINST US, AND IT IS BELIEVED THAT THE INTENSITY OF THIS EFFORT INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY AS THE ILC DRAGGED ON. BRITISH AMBASSADOR BOTTOMLEY, WHO FOLLOWED THE CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS CLOSELY, OBSERVED THAT WE HAD BEEN PAINTING OUTSELVES INTO A

CORNER WITH THE ENTHUSIASTIC HELP OF THE SOVIETS. HE BELIEVED OUR STRATEGY WAS SUCH THAT WE WOULD ULTIMATELY BE FORCED EITHER (A) TO BACK DOWN AND LOSE FACE, OR (B) GET OUT. EITHER WAY THE RUSSIANS WOULD WIN, AND, IN HIS VIEW, THEY DID EVERYTHING THEY COULD TO HELP BOX US IN. WHAT IS NOT SO CLEAR IS WHAT MOTIVATED THE RUSSIANS. ONE SCHOOL OF THOUGHT BELIEVES THAT THE NOTICEABLE INCREASE IN SOVIET ACTIVITY TOWARD THE END OF THE CONFERENCE RESULTED FROM A MOSCOW DECISION WHICH WAS ONLY MADE AT THAT POINT AND WHICH REFLECTED A GENERAL DETERIORATION IN US-SOVIET RELATIONS AND MANEUVERING IN PREPARATION FOR THE BELGRADE CSCE MEETING; THE OTHER SCHOOL OF THOUGHT HOLDS THAT THE RELATIVELY LOW LEVEL OF ACTIVITY OF THE SOVIETS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CONFERENCE AND IN SOME OF THE COMMITTEE MEETINGS COMPARED TO THEIR EFFORTS LATER ON AND ESPECIALLY IN PLENARY MEETINGS REPRESENTED A CALCULATED FEINT TO ENCOURAGE US ON. THIS LATER ASSESSMENT, OR SOME VARIATION OF IT, APPEARS TO DOMINATE MOST THINKING AND IS RELATED TO THE NEXT POINT.

2. US STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL MISCALCULATIONS: IT IS ALWAYS EASY TO MAKE RETROSPECTIVE JUDGMENTS, BUT THE UNANIMOUS VIEW AMONG FRIENDS AND FOE ALIKE IS THAT WE BADLY MISCALCULATED. OUR IMEC FRIENDS LINED UP AND SUPPORTED US, BUT THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE UNHAPPINESS AND CHAFFING AT THE BIT. WE SAW THIS AS NERVOUSNESS ON THEIR PART; THEY SAW US AS EMBARKING ON A STRUGGLE IN A WAY THAT WE WERE VERY LIKELY TO LOSE. ON THE EVE OF THE CONFERENCE AT THE FIRST MEETING OF THE IMEC GROUP, FOR EXAMPLE, THERE WERE SOME WHOSE ASSESSMENT OF THE AFRICAN LABOR MINISTERS MEETING IN TRIPOLI TUNIS WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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JUST THE OPPOSITE OF OURS. WHEREAS WE SAW IT AS THE HIGHWATER MARK OF RADICAL INFLUENCE AMONG THE AFRICANS, THEY JUDGED IT TO REPRESENT THE MAXIMUM THAT MODERATE ARAB INFLUENCE MIGHT HOPE TO ACHIEVE. FOR THE G-77 THERE WAS AN ELEMENT OF MISCALCULATION, TOO, IN THAT THEY MAY HAVE FAILED FINALLY TO GAUGE OUR ULTIMATE DETERMINATION. I UNDERSTAND THAT EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR EL-SHAFEI WAS STUNNED WHEN WE FAILED TO ACCEPT COMPROMISE LANGUAGE THAT WOULD HAVE, IN EFFECT, GIVEN US WHAT WE WANTED ON ARTICLE 17, BUT AS PART OF A PACKAGE ON STRUCTURE. SRI LANKAN AMBASSADOR DE ALWIS EXPRESSED THE SAME SURPRISE, EVEN THOUGH ADMITTING THAT THE US REPRESENTATIVE HAD WARNED HIM THAT WE WOULD MAKE NO DEAL. THIS WAS THE PREVAILING MOOD WHEN THE BRITISH WORKER REPRESENTATIVE CYRIL PLANT WARNED THE ILC THAT BY THEIR VOTE THEY WERE DRIVING THE US FROM THE ILO AND WAS GREETED BY NOISY DERISION. THE OTHER SIDE DID NOT LIKE BEING "THREATENED," AND THEY COULD NOT BRING THEMSELVES TO BELIEVE THAT WE MEANT IT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GENEVA 5480

3. THE COURSE NOW OPEN TO US: OBVIOUSLY THERE ARE TWO -- (1) STAY IN, OR (2) GET OUT, AND SPECULATION FOCUSES ON THE REASONING THAT WILL INFORM THE US DECISION. MANY OF THE G-77 CLING TO THE HOPE THAT THEY WERE RIGHT -- THAT EVEN THOUGH BITTERLY DEFEATED THE US CANNOT AFFORD TO LEAVE A MAJOR UN AGENCY AND ABANDON THE FIELD TO ITS ENEMIES. THIS VIEW HAS BEEN EXPRESSED IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS BY SEVERAL G-77 AMBASSADORS. ALGERIAN AMBASSADOR BOUDJAKDJI QUOTED A FRENCH PROVERB TO THE EFFECT THAT THEY WHO ARE ON THE OUTSIDE ARE ALWAYS WRONG. THE EXPLANATION OF HOW WE WILL NOW JUSTIFY CONTINUED PARTICIPATION HOLDS SOMEWHAT CYNICALLY THAT, ALTHOUGH ROUNDLY DEFEATED, THE USG CAN DISAVOW THE LINE OF ACTION AND POLICY OBJECTIVES LAID DOWN IN ITS LETTER OF INTENT BECAUSE THESE WERE THOSE OF AN EARLIER US ADMINISTRATION. I FIRST HEARD THIS FROM A HIGH RANKING OFFICIAL OF THE ILO, BUT I HAVE SINCE HEARD IT REPEATED A NUMBER OF TIMES AROUND GENEVA. THE OTHER SCHOOL OF THOUGHT HOLDS THAT, HOWEVER MISTAKEN OUR STRATEGY AND TACTICS MIGHT HAVE BEEN, WE NOW REALLY HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO DO WHAT WE SO FORECEFULLY SAID WE WOULD DO IF WE ARE TO RETAIN ANY CREDIBILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS AT ALL IN THE REST OF THE UN SYSTEM

.
IN A SECOND CONVERSATION, AMB BOTTOMLEY SAID THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED EARLY ON THAT, WHATEVER OUR REASONS, WE HAD CLEARLY DECIDED TO "GO FOR BROKE." NOW, HE SAID, "YOU'RE BROKE." OTHERS
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SIMILARLY EXPRESSED THEMSELVES -- SOME WITH CONSIDERABLE EMOTION. HOWEVER DEEPLY THEY REGRETTED IT, IT IS UNTHINKABLE TO THEM THAT WE WOULD NOW REMAIN.

4. AFTERMATH: REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THE US STAYS OR GOES, THE ILO WILL NEVER BE THE SAME. HAVING ROUNDLY THROUNCED US, THE COALITION THAT DID SO NOW HAS THE WHIP HAND AND IS DETERMINED TO REMAKE THE ORGANIZATION IN ITS OWN IMAGE, IF NECESSARY BY HAVING A CONSTITUTIONAL

CONVENTION IN 1979. AND THE IMAGE THAT THEY HAVE IN MIND IS A FAR CRY FROM THE ILO OF TODAY. HERE, I HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY THE CONTRAST IN PERCEPTIONS. THERE REALLY ARE DIFFERENT VALUE SYSTEMS AT WORK AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW THEY CAN BE RECONCILED. IN DISCUSSING HIS COUNTRY'S VIEWS OF THE ILO, FOR EXAMPLE, ARGENTINE AMB MARTINEZ ASKED ME IN ALL SERIOUSNESS WHAT THE ENGLISH WORD WAS WHEN WE REPLACE A LABOR UNION LEADER BY A MILITARY OFFICER. (WE DO NOT HAVE SUCH A WORD, I REPLIED.) VIGNETTES SUCH AS THIS COULD BE REPEATED TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

5. THE REALIZATION OF WHERE THE ILO IS HEADED AS A RESULT OF ALL THIS HAS PUT MOST IMEC REPRESENTATIVES INTO A STATE OF SHOCK. SEVERAL HAVE OPINED THAT IT WILL ONLY BE A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL THEIR OWN COUNTRIES LEAVE THE ORGANIZATION AS WELL. I AM TOLD THAT CYRIL PLANT, HEAD OF THE BRITISH WORKER DELEGATION, WAS SO DISCOURAGED THAT HE HIMSELF WAS CONVINCED IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE ILC THAT BRITAIN SHOULD WITHDRAW AS WELL, ALTHOUGH IT WAS THOUGHT UNLIKELY THAT HE WOULD ULTIMATELY REFLECT THESE VIEWS TO THE TUC ONCE HE HAD HAD A CHANCE TO REFLECT. SIR HALFORD COOK, AUSTRIAN DELEGATE AND FORMER VICE LABOR MINISTER SAID BITTERLY THAT NO "SELF-RESPECTING NATION WOULD STAY IN," ALTHOUGH HE ADDED HE SUPPOSED THE REST OF THE IMEC WOULD TRY FOR A PERIOD. AT BOTTOM IS THE REALIZATION THAT FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES ARE NOW IMMINENT AND THAT IMEC WILL FACE THESE WITHOUT US SUPPORT. BY
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THREATENING THE ULTIMATE SANCTION, US INFLUENCE IN THE ILO WAS AT ITS ZENITH IN THE CONFERENCE. IF WE WERE TO STAY IN NOW, IT WOULD CLEARLY BE ON TERMS OF THE G-77 AND COMMUNIST STATES. THAT IS WHAT THE FIGHT WAS ALL ABOUT, AND WE LOST. SORENSON

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